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The Importance of Creativity in School Culture

ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to indicate the need to develop the culture of creativity in schools in order to enable the participants of educational dialogue to fulfil their personal creativity that will help them reach their potential and improve the common good in their community. The article defines the culture of creativity, describes creativity as a personal quality and indicates its importance in the functioning of students and teachers, as well as in the work of school as an organisation. Emphasis is placed on the need to personalise the processes of education, i.e., to accept the innate abilities, creative potential and multiple intelligences of learners, and to enable them to pursue their interests and develop their strengths. The article indicates the need for creating the environment which supports learners' natural ability to learn and building learning power, which is based on the notion of helping young people to become better learners, cultivating attitudes that enable them to cope with difficulties calmly, confidently and creatively, as well as helping them to build up the mental, emotional, social and strategic resources. Furthermore, the article presents the assumptions of everyday creativity theory, which constitute the fundament of author's creative life orientations concept. The importance of creative life orientations of teachers and students is shown as necessary for building the culture of creativity in school. The range, character and generalised results of the study on preferences for creative life orientations among teachers are briefly presented, indicating a low level of acceptance for this type of orientation and the dominance of preference for conservative and ambivalent orientations. The role of the teacher's pedagogical creativity is emphasised as necessary for creating conditions for learner's creativity and building the culture of creativity in school. Additionally, the article puts emphasis on the need for social acceptance for everyday creativity and acknowledging personal creativity as a value, appreciating it in public sphere, demonstrating its emancipatory value and emphasising its axiological dimension.

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INTRODUCTION

This article is based on the thesis that the culture of creativity needs to be developed in schools of different levels of education in order to enable the participants of educational dialogue to fulfil their personal creativity that will help them reach their potential and improve common good in their community. The aim of the article is to define the culture of creativity and to identify its perception in the process of education and upbringing that takes place in school. The article presents creativity as a personal quality and shows its importance in the functioning of students and teachers, as well as in the work of school as an organisation. Special emphasis is put on the need to personalise educational processes and develop learning processes that will foster the fulfilment of creative potential among education participants. Another aim of the analyses presented in the article is to emphasise the importance of creative life orientations among education participants in creating the culture of creativity in school. The characteristics of the above-mentioned aspects are placed within the frame of everyday creativity theories, which highlight the importance of personal creativity for one's health and development.

I understand the culture of creativity as the presence of human's creative activity, in all its forms and dimensions, in various areas of life, ranging from prominent creativity to liquid creativity, from art to everyday life. The presence of the culture of creativity in a school of higher education requires not only crystallised, mature or prominent creativity (Nęcka, 2002), but also everyday creativity² from all education participants, especially pupils and students.

CREATIVITY IN SCHOOL CULTURE

Creativity as the quality of creator, regardless of what they create, in what domain, how and with what result, is a constitutive element of creative approach to life. It can be observed in creative attitudes, undertaking new tasks, original problem solving, perceiving creativity as value, willingness to fulfil one's potential

² This type of creativity can be related to the first level of creativity proposed by Edward Nęcka (2002), called liquid creativity.

and constantly learn and develop in everyday life. Therefore, I consider creativity to be a personal quality which is expressed in creative life orientations³. According to this approach, creation has an emancipatory, axiological and ethical aspect and helps to achieve well-being and the sense of happiness. It may be professional in character and lead to the creation of significant work in a given area, but it may also manifest in everyday life in solving personal and social problems, taking up new challenges and new tasks, fulfilling one's potential, establishing realistic goals and achieving them through active participation in culture and social life.

I find the development of creative life orientations among the participants of academic dialogue to be a significant factor of building the culture of creativity in a school of higher education and a very important element of the education process in general. The result of this process should be an empowered citizen, i.e., the citizen who has intellectual abilities for reflection, reasoning and argumentation in the problem-solving process, is well-informed, educated and able to participate in public life (Potulicka, 2005), and moreover, who wants to and is able to participate in social dialogue. A fundamental expression of citizens' readiness to participate in social life is taking part in local government elections, parliamentary elections, referendums, which enable one to cast a vote regarding an important matter for a local community or the whole nation. In contemporary democratic societies, participation in elections has a fundamental importance for the fulfilment of the principles of equality and justice in social life. "Democratic societies depend for their strength on the majority of people being active citizens at the ballot box and in the community. The ballot box is democracy's sharpest tool. In many democracies, it is becoming dangerously blunted. Schools [including schools of higher education – A.C.] have vital roles in cultivating that sense of citizenship" (Robinson & Aronica, 2015, p. 83). Schools of higher education will not fulfil these roles unless they are the places which practice the principles of social and creative activity, enabling the participants of academic education to fulfil their creative potential and achieve well-being in both individual and social dimension.

³ The concept of creative life orientations is presented in three monographs which combine theoretical assumptions with results of the studies conducted among higher education students, students from schools of secondary education and teachers, with the use of my original Scale for Measuring Preference for Creative Life Orientations (Cudowska, 2004, 2014, 2017).

PERSONALISED EDUCATION

Therefore, it appears vital to create a more personalised, ecological culture of learning in school which enables using students' and teachers' creativity in order to prepare them to cope with today's challenges and reach their full potential. There is substantial evidence that contemporary economies of developed countries rely on creativity and innovation, concepts that not only are not cultivated, but sometimes are even damaged by standardised education. A negative correlation may even be observed between the country's results in standardised external examinations and the level of entrepreneurship (Zhao, 2012). A personalised approach to education entails accepting the fact that all pupils and students have certain innate abilities, creative potential and multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983, 1993, 2000). This approach enables pupils to pursue their individual interests and develop their strengths. The process of personalisation of education also entails adjusting the programme to different pace at which pupils learn and such evaluation of learners that supports their personal potential and achievements (Robinson & Aronica, 2015).

Creating the environment which supports pupils' natural ability to learn is a priority in developing creativity among the participants of school education. Such environment should use various experiences and context, play and role-playing. Analyses of this subject matter emphasise the significance of visionary leadership in introducing changes which promote different types of creativity, both at personal and organisational level, as well as the need for school principals and teachers to create conditions for pupils to develop and support learning. Ken Robinson proposed that in order to improve education, it should be based on four pillars, such as: a) health, i.e., support and development of pupil's well-being in the intellectual, physical, spiritual and social sense; b) ecology, i.e., taking care of sustainable growth of pupils and the whole community; c) justice, i.e., cultivating talents and potential of all pupils regardless of their life situation; d) caution, i.e., creating optimal conditions for pupils' development, guided by concern, experience and practical wisdom. According to this approach, the fundamental task of education is to animate the living culture of schools so that they can fulfil their economic, cultural, social and personal goals. They are manifested in creating conditions for pupils to achieve financial independence, understand and appreciate their culture and respect the diversity of other cultures, to become active and sensitive citizens (Robinson & Aronica, 2015).

Partnership relations between pupils, students and teachers are the fundament of learning. In order for it to lead to development of personal creativity of the

participants of educational dialogue, it is vital to understand the nature of learning and creativity as the process of becoming a human and human growth. This process requires creating conditions that will enable pupils and students to manifest their creative potential. Teacher's fundamental role is to help them to learn and be creative, while fundamental role of people organising school education, including high school education, as well as decision-makers who develop and implement education policy, is to enable teachers to fulfil their duties in this matter. Pupils' and students' achievements are mostly influenced by their expectations towards themselves (Hattie, 2009)⁴, however teachers' expectations towards pupils also play a major role (Smith, 2011). "The best teachers are not only instructors. They are mentors and guides who can raise the confidence of their students, help them find a sense of direction and empower them to believe in themselves" (Robinson & Aronica, 2015, p. 146). It is therefore necessary to invest not only in education, but also in teachers, since their professional growth, progress and creativity are the prerequisite for developing the culture of creativity in schools and turning schools into learning organisations. I consider both elements to be very important in facilitating the progress and fulfil creative potential of learners and teachers who also constantly learn.

SUPPORT IN LEARNING

Another interesting proposition in this matter is Guy Claxton's (2002) Building Learning Power concept, based on the notion of helping young people to become better learners both in school and out. It is about creating a culture in classrooms that cultivates habits and attitudes that enable young people to face difficulties calmly, confidently and creatively. It is based on three assumptions placed in axiological and teleological sphere of education. Building Learning Power's idea is that the core purpose of education is to prepare young people for life after school, to help them build up the mental, emotional, social and strategic resources to cope well with uncertainty and complexity. In order to do this, it is necessary to support learners in discovering the things they would really like to do, what they would like to excel at and to strengthen their will and the skills to pursue them. Achieving both aims is linked with the third assumption that we can help a person develop their intelligence and help them in internalising such values as certainty, opportunity and passion,

⁴ J. Hattie analysed the results of the studies conducted in various countries regarding the factors that influence pupils' achievements and created a list of 140 such factors.

which are required in pursuing the goal (Claxton, 2006, 2008; Gornall, Chambers, & Claxton, 2005; Claxton, Chambers, Powell, & Lucas, 2011).

Intelligence and skills are not something constant, they can be developed throughout life. The process of learning never ends, since human being constantly acquires new knowledge and perfects skills. One of the vital skills is the ability of life-long learning which one should be equipped with by school. “When a learner knows how to learn, they will learn everything they need in a given moment, meaning they will find the required information or content themselves. School should teach the learner how to organise this information and equip them in skills necessary for living and life-long learning” (Wollman, 2013, p. 12). In order to do that, it is vital to put focus of education and upbringing on the whole person, their attitudes, system of values, interpersonal relations, self-image, as well as their skills and strategies for learning. It is vital to internalise the value of learning, identify one’s strengths and weaknesses, and find resources, such as other people or specific techniques or tools that may help one to effectively overcome obstacles without nervousness and discouragement (Claxton, 2002).

The Building Learning Power concept is organised around four main dispositions important in the process: 1) resilience, 2) resourcefulness, 3) reflectiveness, and 4) reciprocity. Potential for learning is described by capacities, assigned to specific dispositions, which correspond to four aspects of learning: emotional (resilience), cognitive (resourcefulness), strategic (reflectiveness), and social (reciprocity). Resilience, which means the eagerness and ability to focus on learning process, is composed of absorption, managing distractions, noticing and perseverance. Resourcefulness, i.e., being eager, ready and apt to learn in various ways, is composed of questioning, making links, imagining, reasoning and capitalising⁵. A resourceful learner has a wide range of attitudes and strategies they may use when facing problems. Reflectiveness, defined as being eager, ready and apt to learn strategically, is composed of planning, revising, selection, transfer and meta-learning. Reciprocity, i.e., being ready, eager and apt to learn not only alone but also with others, is composed of five capacities: interdependence, collaboration, empathy, listening and imitation. This social aspect of learning is particularly important, not only because most professions require us to collaborate with others, but also because proper, satisfying interpersonal relations are one of the conditions for well-being and quality of life. Building Learning Power concept is oriented at building a culture of learning in school, however learning also takes place outside

⁵ Capitalising is defined here as using the whole range of resources from the outside world – other people, books, the Internet, past experiences, future possibilities.

the official school and university environment, outside formal programmes and artificially created educational situations. It happens “wherever there are eager learners and engaging teachers” (Robinson & Aronica, 2015, p. 104), because the heart of education is the relationship between the student and the teacher and “everything else depends on how productive and successful that relationship is” (Robinson & Aronica, 2015, p. 104).

CREATIVITY IN EVERYDAY POLICY

Dispositions and capacities described in Guy Claxton’s concept, which are vital for learning process and strengthen it, are also very important in creative attitude to life, manifested in creativity in learning. “Creativity and interdisciplinary thinking are what the world demands” (Robinson & Aronica, 2015, p. 225). Creativity of educational dialogue participants is what can drive change in schools from the bottom up, through everyday progress and transforming school into a learning organisation, an institution that is about constant growth and concern for the common good, for making the world a better place. The pedagogy of creativity distinguishes creativity from creation and perceives it as a quality which refers to one’s personality and not one’s creative work. It is therefore connected with human behaviour and conscious action (Limont, 2003) and may be treated as the synonym for creative attitude, i.e., “a constant life disposition, manifested in innovator’s various behaviours” (Szmids, 2013, p. 83).

Creativity understood as one’s ability to generate new and valuable output, may be the source of subjective mental well-being and influence its objective condition through motivating a person to undertake actions aimed at personal development and acquiring personal resources. Thus, it may help to overcome life difficulties and solve problems, and when the problems appear, help to understand them and minimise their negative impact on one’s health and life (Crafft, 2000; Richards, 1999). Creativity may therefore be both the source and effect of mental well-being which enables one to be creative in everyday life. It is to a large extent the function of a specific type of motivation, characterised by childlike curiosity, having interest in activities for their own sake and perseverance in action (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

Human creativity in everyday life is treated as the resource which helps to maintain health and achieve well-being. Creativity may be the source of many new experiences and joys resulting from engagement, creative process and satisfaction from solving problems in a novel way. It opens one for the new and the

extraordinary, however it also helps to look at ordinary things in a new, unusual way and notice the extraordinary where no one else sees anything interesting. It enables one to notice things and phenomena in a new light and become open for interpersonal relations. There probably may also be a bilateral relationship – not only do the creative life orientations foster subjective well-being and sense of happiness, but also the sense of happiness makes one more creative and creativity-oriented. Therefore, one may, through everyday creativity, achieve the sense of well-being and make a valuable contribution to the community functioning and development.

CREATIVE APPROACH TO LIFE

Creativity is expressed in one's creative life orientations, a concept I have been developing for several years, both in theoretical and empirical aspect. Creative life orientations are deeply personal and fully engaged ways of handling everyday responsibilities. They are specific to one person, since there are no two ways to realise creative life orientations that are the same. A fundamental imperative for shaping life orientation is the awareness of one's decisions and making an effort to be autonomous. It is characterised by: purpose of one's actions, ability and willingness to undertake new tasks, sense of control over external situations, undertaking new challenges, trying out various ways to handle difficult situations, conscious action aimed at self-development, enriching one's personality, acquiring new experiences and skills, reflectiveness and being rooted in existence, sense of responsibility for common good. A creatively oriented person makes attempts to make values reality, lives by their values, and makes conscious axiological choices. Creative life orientations are shaped throughout life. They are dynamic, changing with new experiences, relations with people and the environment, the world of technology or culture. A creatively oriented person also transgresses their own limits and external obstacles on the way to the goal. Creativity fosters strengthening personal powers and looking for resources that allow for empowerment. Creative life orientations are always shaped in dialogue with one's internal and external world, in the process of gaining autonomy and defining the borders of one's personal freedom.

I have been conducting studies on creative life orientations for several years in socially diverse groups. Pedagogy students are frequent subjects of my explorations, as a community especially significant in identifying the approaches, system of values, beliefs, aspirations and life plans that can be manifested in life orienta-

tions. This community is composed of people on the threshold of independence. Some of them are already active on the job market, some are in relationships, often formalised, however most students are focused on the role of the student, sometimes on two different faculties. Pedagogy students, majority of whom prepare to become pre-school or primary school teachers, are especially obliged to develop creativity, required by this profession.

I have hitherto conducted studies on preferences for creative life orientations on a group of 2,228 people, including 322 primary and secondary school teachers, 340 secondary school students and 1,566 students from various schools of higher education, faculties and specialisations, however with the dominance of Pedagogy students⁶. As far as Pedagogy students are concerned, this group is dominated by students whose major fields are Pre-School Education and Early Childhood Education. My explorations had a diagnostic and quantitative character and were focused on determining life orientations preferences in creative *versus* conservative dimension among the participants of institutionalised education. All studies were conducted with the use of the same tool, my original Scale for Measuring Preference for Creative Life Orientations, whose reliability and accuracy were proven in the course of statistical analyses, with Cronbach's alpha reliability rate for the Scale for Measuring Preference for Creative Life Orientations Questionnaire amounting to 0.86. Presentation of the results of these explorations far exceeds the framework of this article. Some of them have already been presented in author's monographs (Cudowska 2004, 2014, 2017), others will be published in subsequent works. A synthetic, holistic approach to preferences of the study participants as to life orientations in creative versus conservative dimension, reveal a dominance of conservative and ambivalent orientations over creative orientations. It certainly

⁶ In the first study conducted in 2000–2002, preference for creative life orientations was checked among 354 Pedagogy students of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology at the University of Białystok, Pułtusk Academy of Humanities, and College of Business and Entrepreneurship in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski. In the study conducted in 2006–2010, the same tool (author's original Scale for Measuring Preference for Creative Life Orientations) was used on 276 students from schools of higher education in Białystok: University of Białystok, Medical University in Białystok, Białystok University of Technology, The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw, Faculty of Puppet-Theatre Arts in Białystok, Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw, Faculty of Instrumental and Educational Studies in Białystok, Non-State College of Pedagogy in Białystok, College of Public Administration in Białystok, Białystok School of Economics, University of Finance and Management, College of Real Estate Management. In 2014–2016, a study was conducted as part of two projects. 363 Pedagogy students from the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology at the University of Białystok took part in the first project, while in the second project I engaged 303 Pedagogy students from the same faculty and 270 students from the Brest State University named after A.S. Pushkin in Belarus, studying at the Faculty of Psychology and Pedagogy and at the Faculty of Sociology and Pedagogy.

does not mean we should reach unambiguous conclusions, however it may signal the need to put more emphasis on stimulating and developing creativity in educational institutions. Especially as regardless of the profession, creativity as defined in this article will be required from university and college graduates, particularly in the profession of pedagogue, teacher, or educator.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis conducted so far and concepts it evoked demonstrate the need to develop creativity among learners/students and teachers, as well as other people who have influence on the culture of learning and school culture (including school of higher education), with school understood as an organisation which enables the realisation of educational process. Creative approach to life, manifested in creative life orientations, is also a way to embody creativity in everyday life and school operations. Teachers' pedagogical creativity, manifested in creative teaching, being a prerequisite for good teaching, is particularly important in establishing conditions for learners'/students' personal creativity and building learning power. Creative teaching is understood as such teacher's approach to students' learning process which develops and modifies the teaching materials and methods in order to make students interested and motivate them to acquire knowledge. Pedagogical creativity also comprises teaching for creativity, i.e., such teacher's actions whose aim is to develop students' individual capacities for creative thinking and activity. "Teaching creativity evokes creative teaching, since stimulating students' creativity engages teacher's creative capacities" (Szmidt, 2013, p. 26), even though they are not equivalent. Teaching creativity requires making students confident to undertake creative activities, helping them identify their creative abilities, as well as supporting their creativity. Helping learners and students to develop their creativity appears to be the fundamental task of a teacher who practices their profession in a creative way⁷.

⁷ Teacher's creativity may also be understood very broadly as pedagogical innovation, which is the most complex innovatory activity. "Innovative teacher is first and foremost the teacher-researcher, creator and user of new knowledge, someone who enriches information resources of educational practice and designs (and implements) new solutions, resulting in development of education and pedagogical progress" (Schulz, 1989, p. 33). The essence of pedagogical innovation is for teachers and educators to undertake creative activities which improve the quality of education system. They also implement new goals, content, ways of working and organisational forms to educational practice. Pedagogical innovation results from teacher's initiative and involvement in developing the programme for change and its implementation (Schulz, 1989).

I perceive teacher's pedagogical creativity as an element of their creative life orientation, which combines some traits of character, attitudes, axiological beliefs, normative reasons, ambitions and opinions. Studies indicate that creatively-oriented teachers are more creative in their work than teachers manifesting conservative life orientations⁸. Such teachers create the culture of creativity in schools, which fosters spontaneous learning and constant cooperation between teachers, students, parents and local community. It is based on mutual dialogical relations in everyday work, creating a learning community, with teachers and students jointly establishing goals, tasks and procedures for common good (Kwieciński, 2000). It changes the school vision from routinized and standardised to creative. Creative approach to work is dominated by partnership relations between people, team work, seeking new ways of achieving goals, developing research approach, dialogical education strategy, sense of control and reflectiveness.

In my opinion, shaping the culture of creativity in education requires acknowledging creativity, i.e., everyday creative activities, as valuable and beneficial to personal development and development of one's environment. Furthermore, social acceptance for everyday creativity, its appreciation in public sphere, manifesting its emancipatory quality and emphasising its axiological dimension are essential as well. Creativity is significant both in subjective and intersubjective sphere of experience, as its essence is taking action for common good, improving one's environment and making the world more ethical. Such framework encapsulates shaping creative life orientations among the participants of educational dialogue as indispensable preferences for developing the culture of creativity in schools.

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⁸ I have hitherto conducted studies on over three hundred teachers of primary and secondary schools. The diagnosis of their preferences for life orientations in creative versus conservative dimension was presented in my work Cudowska, A. (2014). *Twórcze orientacje życiowe w dialogu edukacyjnym. Studium teoretyczno-empiryczne* [Creative Life Orientations in Educational Dialogue: Theoretical and Empirical Study], Białystok: Wydawnictwo Trans Humana. Another study on this subject matter was conducted by Marta Walewska, and its results were presented in her doctoral dissertation, written under my supervision, entitled *Uwarunkowania twórczych orientacji życiowych nauczycieli edukacji wczesnoszkolnej* [Determinants for Creative Life Orientations of Early Education Teachers], Archive of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology at the University of Białystok.

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